DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 013 CS 210 186

AUTHOR Rosen, Lois M.; Wright, Marian E.
TITLE Supporting the Process of Change: It Takes More Than a Workshop or Two.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; Classroom Research; Classroom Techniques; College School Cooperation; Creative Writing; *Curriculum Development; Diaries; Elementary Education; Middle Schools; Revision (Written Composition); Skill Development; Student Publications; Student Writing Models; Teacher Student Relationship; Theory Practice Relationship; Writing Evaluation; Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Free Writing; Teacher Writing; *Writing Attitudes; Writing Workshops

ABSTRACT

The Flind Middle Schools Writing Inservice Project grew out of the conviction that improving students' writing was a matter not of increased emphasis on sentence structure, grammar, or form, but rather of a change in the thinking about how writing should be taught. The project grew from a brief conference to a two-year commitment on the part of leaders (a University of Michigan faculty member and a Flint Community Schools staff consultant), teachers, and students. In after school workshops teachers were asked to adopt a writing process model that moved students through a full gamut of steps and stages in composing. Project leaders visited all the classrooms involved, not to evaluate, but to interact with students and teachers when the students were involved in writing and to offer individual help. Each workshop focused on a different phase of the writing process (creating the accepting environment, drafting, revision, etc.), and teachers discussed their successes and problems, worked on their own writing, and collected notes. In the second year modeling techniques were used extensively in the classroom, and there was more peer feedback about revision and editing, as well as publication of student writing. The project was a success, probably because of the university/school district collaboration and the workshop/classroom visit structure. (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED278013

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SUPPORTING THE PROCESS OF CHANGE: IT TAKES MORE THAN A WORKSHOP OR TWO

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lois Matz Rosen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Lois M. Rosen
Assistant Professor
University of Michigan-Flint

Marian E. Wright
Staff Consultant
Flint Community Schools

CS 210 186

SUPPORTING THE PROCESS OF CHANGE: IT TAKES MORE THAN A WORKSHOP OR TWO

Since Fall 1984, the Flint middle school language arts teachers have been involved in a Writing Inservice Project co-directed by Marian Wright, middle school language arts staff consultant for the Flint Community Schools, and Lois Rosen, Assistant Professor of English at the University of Michigan - Flint. The Flint Community Schools, serving 31,000 students in an industrial urban community located northwest of Detroit, Michigan, have a long-standing commitment to helping all students develop their academic potential and, by offering numerous staff development opportunities, are committed to encouraging teachers to improve their instructional methods and skills. But the language arts emphasis in both classroom practices and testing programs had been, until this Project, on reading skills, grammar, and writing mechanics. The need for more emphasis on writing was critical: students were doing very little writing or none at all; and when they were writing, instruction was likely to center on the form and correctness of the final product rather than on helping students move successfully through the writing process. The following report describes the program that grew out of this need and the process of change as it occurred over a two-year period. We hope this report will serve as a useful model for any schools or districts contemplating a staff development program.

Birth of the Project: Marian

"Teach writing! How can I teach these kids to write when they don't even know what a sentence is? Sure, I'll teach writing after they can write a sentence and learn a few other skills. But they have to have the skills before they can write."

These were the responses I received when I talked with our middle school language arts teachers about writing. Teachers agreed with public opinion that our students lacked the ability to communicate their ideas and thoughts effectively in writing. But, as they perceived it, the reason for the problem was that students just did not have the basic skills of sentence structure, grammar, and the mechanics of capitalization and punctuation. The solution to the problem, therefore, was that we needed to do a better job of teaching those basic skills.

Having returned from a three-week intensive experience in a 1983 summer Writing Project, which completely changed my behavior as a writer as well as my thinking about writing instruction, I knew that an increased emphasis on sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics was not going to help our students become better writers. That is exactly what we had been doing, and it simply wasn't working. We had to make a change - a change in our thinking about how writing should be taught.

It is not easy to change life-long habits. Most of us were brought up on the importance of correctness whenever we set pen or pencil to paper. As students, our compositions were graded on correctness of grammar, form, and mechanics. Therefore, as good teachers of writing we, too, emphasized correctness. As a result we received compositions from our students which were mechanically correct, but dull, stifled, and uninteresting in content. We gave those compositions high evaluations because they were correct, even though we fervently wished they could have been more interesting to read.

When I think about correctness, I am reminded of the day when I heard a seventh grade student in a class taught by one of the Flint Writing Project teachers read his piece describing a frightening experience. Ronald held his classmates in absolute suspense as he vividly described coming home from school one day to find his mother on the couch "burning up with fever," yet assuring him that she would be all right. Hearing her cries for help during the night, he ran to the neighbor's house in his "sock feet" to get help, and then watched the paramedics place his mother in the ambulance. All of us, hoping for a happy ending, were stunned and saddened when the story concluded: "My mother died the next day." When class was over, I asked to see Ronald's piece, thinking of ways to publish it. I couldn't believe that the piece of writing I looked at was the same piece I had heard. There was not one mark of punctuation in two full pages of writing! Yet, Ronald read that piece with polish and feeling. I wonder if that meaningful story would have emerged had his teacher admonished: "Make sure you write in complete sentences with capitals and periods."

I am not saying that correctness isn't important. Correctness certainly is important, but not in the beginning when writers are first putting their thoughts, experiences, and ideas into words. At this point we need to free our student writers from the constraints of form and mechanics by telling them:

"Don't worry about spelling, periods, commas, and capitals now. We'll take care of that later. Just write what you want to say." When beginning a piece of writing, writers need to give their total concentration and effort to what they are saying. Once they have written what they want to say, the focus can be turned to how it is said. The next day during a writing conference, Ronald's teacher asked him to read his piece out loud to her and put the periods in "so someone else can read your story as well as you did yesterday." He did this eagerly and effortlessly.

Where do you begin to help teachers and administrators change their thinking about writing instruction? In 1983 I saw it as an insurmountable task, feeling as if I were chipping away at a mountain with a teaspoon!

Knowing that the first step in the process of change is the recognition and identification of the need for change, I embarked on a writing awareness campaign. Writing was the focus of my written and verbal communications with teachers and administrators: I reproduced articles describing the newest theory and techniques in the teaching of writing and distributed them to teachers; I publicized every writing conference available and urged teachers to attend; I made available all information on university courses in the teaching of writing for those interested in acquiring graduate credits; I used the negative results of the state writing assessment to stimulate discussion in curriculum meetings; I spent time with teachers who were giving their students some good writing experiences, sharing their successes and helping them develop new ideas. Finally, I began to hear teachers and administrators not only talk about writing, but indicate the need to do something about it. Something was beginning to happen!

In the spring of 1984, the Flint Community Schools co-sponsored a day and a half writing conference with a neighboring school district and the local intermediate school district. Three of our language arts teachers attended this conference conducted by Dr. Lois Rosen, then from Adrian College. It was an excellent awareness experience, but it did show me that we needed so much more. The majority of Flint's 1,421 classroom teachers received their teacher training prior to the mid-sixties when much of the current knowledge about the process of writing was being disseminated. A single one or two day conference could only introduce our Flint teachers to a more effective way of teaching writing, not

effect a change in the way writing was taught in their classrooms. We really needed a much more intensive and sustained commitment to training teachers in this new approach to teaching writing. When Lois joined the faculty at the University of Michigan - Flint in Fall 1984, we arranged a planning session with the Language Arts Coordinator, the Director of Curriculum Services, the Director of Middle School Education, and the Deputy Superintendent of the Flint Community Schools. As a result, the Flint Middle Schools Writing Inservice Project was born!

Strategy and Structure: Lois

When Marian Wright asked if I was interested in "doing something about writing" with the Flint middle school language arts teachers, my first response was to consider setting up a Writing Project in Flint modeled after the National Writing Project. I had spent two summers co-directing the Southeast Michigan Writing Project and knew how successful the Writing Project's summer institutes were.

I quickly realized, however, that a summer institute was not feasible for Flint at this time. First, funding efforts would be necessary, and second, we would have to wait until the following summer at the earliest to initiate it. We would do better to begin in September with a format designed to suit our present needs, yet still duplicate the following two consistent features of all Writing Projects:

1. Writing is viewed as a complex process that includes a pre-writing phase of thinking, planning, generating material; a writing and revising phase for drafting and re-drafting; a post-writing phase of polishing, proofreading, and "publishing" the final product.

2. Project teachers write because it is through working on their own writing that they come to better understand the process writers go through as they compose and the kinds of activities that best support the composing process.

With these ideas in mind, I planned a series of three-hour workshops scheduled after school throughout the year. One of the benefits of this plan was that it would give the Project teachers a chance to use the new methods and materials after each workshop and bring the results to the following workshop where we could provide a mutual support group for sharing successes and problems. I was concerned, however, that the teachers would be hesitant to try out these new approaches and would merely come to the workshops to find out what was new and collect handouts, which would be filed away and forgotten. Also, I was not happy to think of myself in the role of the university faculty "outsider," dispensing the latest information, yet totally divorced from the day-to-day reality of the classroom teacher. It was important to get inside the closed box of the classroom and actually work with teachers and students as they experimented with the methods I would present at the workshops.

In asking teachers to adopt a writing process model, we were asking them to change much more than just teaching methods. Their attitudes toward writng and their role in the classroom would have to alter as well. We were asking them to focus on students' ideas instead of the form in which they were expressed; provide help in generating material instead of simply assigning topics; praise what students did well and help them reconsider ways to revise what wasn't working; provide for peer readers and student response instead of just collecting and grading the finished product; read drafts and encourage revision; hold writing conferences; see themselves as coaches, informed readers, fellow-writers rather than evaluator/graders. In short, we were asking teachers to move students through a full gamut of steps and stages in composing and to be heavily involved throughout in positive and supportive ways. This was a drastic change from the familiar "assign/correct/grade" approach with its heavy emphasis on correctness.

In "The Buck Stops Here: A Concerns-Based Approach to Curriculum Change," (Educational Leadership, December 1979) Loucks and Pratt describe change as a "process that takes time" (213) rather than an event that can occur simply through exposure to an inservice. They stress the fact that the teachers must change, not the institution, that this involves an alteration in feelings and attitudes as well as methods, and that this process of change is a unique experience for each individual teacher. Guided by a sense that the teachers

would benefit from our presence in their classes as they went through the transition, I added two sets of "classroom visits" to our inservice program. Marian and I planned to visit at least one class per teacher each time, not to evaluate, but to interact with both teachers and students when the students were involved in writing. We wanted to support the teachers in their efforts to change and offer each teacher the individual help that was needed. These visits turned out to be the most effective, and most well-received, part of the Project for all concerned--teachers, students, administrators, and for us, too. Figure 1 shows the 1984-85 schedule of workshop topics and class visits.

The Project began with an initial "kick-off" session, open to all middle school language arts teachers and administrators, designed to provoke interest in the Project, expose some of the problems and issues surrounding the teaching of writing, and give a brief but complete overview of the writing process and the teacher's role in a process-oriented classroom. By the following session, held a month later, fourteen teachers, at least one from each of the six middle schools in the city and two from the academic secondary school, had enrolled in the Project. We had hoped for a larger enrollment even though the teachers received no monetary incentive or release time; however, we were confident that those who signed up for the Project were sincerely committed and eager to learn, an assumption that proved true in most cases. A core of twelve teachers remained with the Project throughout the first year.

Each workshop focused on a different phase of the writing process, moving from the initial stages of generating writing and creating the accepting environment that was conducive to writing, through drafting, revision, proofreading, publishing, and evaluating/grading. The teachers discussed their successes and problems in the teaching of writing, were presented with new ideas and materials, and worked on their own writing. A large red looseleaf notebook was given to each Project teacher to store notes and handouts.

At the end of the first year, we all recognized that the Project needed to continue in order for the teachers to become more knowledgeable and secure in their use of this new approach to writing instruction. By this time, word had spread that something special was happening in the Flint Writing Project, generating renewed interest among the remaining middle school language arts teachers. When we opened the 1985-86 program to additional teachers, nine of the original twelve teachers returned for a second year and seven new teachers

joined the Project.

After some initial concern about boring the experienced teachers if we went over the same material or confusing the new ones if we didn't, and some discussion of separate sessions for the new teachers, we decided that the support the experienced Project teachers could give to the seven new teachers would more than compensate for any problems they might have with the process approach. As for boredom, we dealt with that by changing the content of each workshop from that of the first year, yet adhering to the same general plan of giving an overview at the first session and then moving through the inter-related steps of the writing process from workshop to workshop. The new teachers also received their red notebook already stuffed with the 1984-85 handouts. Figure 2 illustrates the 1985-86 schedule.

We added several new features to the second year plan. At the request of the teachers, I began to give "demo" lessons when we visited the schools. We also instituted an after school "roundtable" session at the end of each full day of classroom visits in which we sat down with the Project teachers in the school (and often with the administrators who joined us to find out what was happening) for some general sharing and discussion of their own students' writing behaviors and the writing concerns unique to that school. Finally, in the spring, Marian undertook the production of a student publication because we were overwhelmed by the amount and variety of fine student writing pouring out of the Project teachers' classrooms and wanted to help the students begin to see themselves as writers with real messages to communicate to readers. We felt the opportunity to publish would provide a realistic incentive for motivating both teachers and students to work on revision and proofreading skills.

The Process of Change

If there is anything we both learned from the two years of our involvement in this Project, it's that curriculum change is a slow process rarely proceeding in an even uphill pattern. We came to appreciate the wisdom of Loucks' and Pratt's "concerns-based approach," and to constantly focus our sights on signs of progress, using our disappointments and at times our outright dismay, to plan future strategies. Throughout the two years, we kept field notes from our classroom visits, saved written responses and comments about writing made by the

Project teachers, jotted down observations about workshops, and collected samples of student writing. The rest of this report will draw on those notes to document the process of change we saw occurring in the Project teachers and their students.

The Teachers

Our purpose in initiating the Flint Writing Project was to convince teachers that a process approach to writing instruction is a practical, natural, and effective way of helping students become more comfortable with writing and more proficient in their writing skills. Have we been successful? Have the Project teachers really changed the way in which they teach writing? After two years, we can state an emphatic "YES" to those questions.

In the beginning, the Project teachers had several concerns. A major concern was TIME. "If I teach writing and spend all the time it requires, how am I going to cover the other parts of the curriculum--the grammar, the spelling, literature, study skills, etc?" There were concerns about the "atrociousness of students' grammar and mechanical skills" and how to deal with it. The teachers were worried about grading evaluating writing, and "how to get students to write without always expecting me to read and grade everything." Getting students to revise, or even to just reread their work, was also a concern. Some teachers were skeptical about having students respond to each other's writing, thinking the students couldn't handle it and would "pan" or make fun of each other in a negative way. Others wondered how students could possibly help each other when they couldn't proof and edit their own papers. Those were very real concerns. We knew that it would take time--lots of time--to resolve them.

Many of the teachers joined the Project because they were looking for a better way to teach writing; so, despite their apprehensions, they were willing to give this different approach a try. Enthused with ideas presented in the workshops, they often commented: "I can hardly wait to get to school tomorrow and try this out!" During our first round of classroom visits we saw the teachers really using the multitude of "generating writing" ideas presented in the first workshops. Bubbling with excitement and pride, they showed us their students' journals and writing folders, marveling at the quantity of writing produced.

Teachers were in the process of experimenting and discovering. They were discovering not only that their students really did have a lot to say, but that they enjoyed saying it in writing, especially when they wrote about what they knew best--their own experiences. One teacher was amazed that even "students weak in spelling and grammar do have a lot of good things say." Teachers were discovering, too, that allowing students to talk with each other about their writing stimulated them to write more descriptively, adding important and interesting details to their pieces. The Project teachers also were beginning to first look for the good points in a piece of writing rather than the mistakes. As one teacher said, "I praise a lot now, something I would not have done a few years ago."

Teachers were pleased with what was happening. One teacher said with amazement, "I just give out the paper and make sure that everyone has a pen or pencil. Then I tell them to write. They do it all!" We had to tell her that she had created the environment for the writing and sharing, and she had given the assignment; the writing didn't just happen, as if by magic, although it almost seemed that way.

During the first round of classroom visits, however, we found the teachers almost frozen at the generating stage. They were pleased with what was happening but realized that was only the beginning. "Now that I have them started in writing, what I do I do next?" was the question frequently asked of us as we visited classrooms. They weren't sure how to help their student writers move into the next steps of revising, editing, and publishing.

There was also a feeling of insecurity: "Am I doing this right? Am I on the right track?" As they showed us student folders full of interesting, lively writing, the teachers apologized for the errors. They were relieved when we told them, "Don't worry about the mechanics now; look at what this student has written--it's wonderful!" A few teachers experimented with peer response groups, but were uncomfortable with the results. "The room was so noisy. I felt out of control not knowing exactly what they were doing in those groups. Is this the way it should be?" We assured them the room cannot be quiet when several students are talking with each other in small groups, and then shared ways of structuring response groups and controlling the noise level.

Those concerns were addressed during the next workshops. The focus for the second round of classroom visits was revising and editing. Our message to the

Project teachers was: "This time we would like to be more involved with students as they work on revising and editing drafts in preparation for some type of publication." The teachers responded favorably so that during our visits we were active participants in classrooms that buzzed with the energizing excitement and stimulation of a writing workshop.

Change was beginning to take place. By the end of the first year the Project teachers were beginning to feel more confident about teaching writing. Helen even decided to replace the time-honored, traditional final examination with a piece of writing! Given administrative approval, she had students in one of her classes use the process of writing--prewriting, drafting, revising, editing--to produce a finished piece of writing suitable for publication. This experiment was so successful she used it the next year with all of her students. "After all," she said, "why not test them on the application of what we have been doing all year, rather than asking them to identify the parts of speech."

The teachers had experienced a glimpse of something wonderful and exciting happening in their classrooms because of the impact of writing; they were eager to do more with it and learn more about it. As Imogene said, "I see now what I would have liked to do and should have done. Next year I'll do it." Several teachers planned to study the 'red notebook' during the summer and set some realistic goals for the next year. One of our Project teachers with over twenty years of classroom experience told us: "Give me time. You know I've been teaching out of that grammar book for years and it's hard to change all of a sudden, but I am. Just give me time."

Sixteen teachers committed themselves to the second year of the Project. The seven new Project teachers had the same concerns the experienced teachers had a year ago, but were encouraged and reassured as they listened to the success stories enthusiastically shared by the nine experienced teachers. The experienced teachers expressed greater confidence in teaching writing, and seemed to become even more energized as they recalled the high points of last year and anticipated the year ahead.

The first round of visits during the second year showed us how important and powerful our own modeling had been for the experienced teachers. During classroom visits the teachers saw us interacting with students, moving all over the classroom spending a few minutes with one student and then on to another, giving a pat on the shoulder, laughing at the humor in some pieces, while

showing concern with the seriousness of others. They saw us pull up a chair or crouch down beside a student so we could talk face-to-face. Now, we were seeing the effects of that modeling. The environment and configuration in the classrooms of the experienced teachers was changing from straight rows and silence to several small response group clusters and constructive dialogue between students. There was greater involvement between teachers and students while writing was going on in the classroom. No longer were the Project teachers just making assignments; they were a part of the action!

We used modeling more extensively during the second year classroom visits. The new Project teachers were a little apprehensive about the classroom visits so Lois gave demonstration lessons in which she guided students in deciding what to write about, put them through several pre-writing activities, gave them twenty minutes or so to write a draft, and concluded with a little time for sharing what they had written. The teacher followed-through the next day with more sharing and then revising. This modeling technique was very helpful in showing teachers how to get writing started and how to direct students toward becoming positive and helpful responders for each other. Several teachers used the model with their other classes and were pleased with the good pieces of writing produced, even from the most reluctant students.

Getting students to revise their pieces still remained a concern. Two teachers discovered part of the difficulty was that the students didn't understand what revision meant. After guiding the whole class through a step-by-step revision of a student's paper projected on an overhead screen their students responded: "Oh, that's what you want us to do!"

Grading and evaluating students' writings remained a worry for most of the Project teachers. They accepted the idea that not every piece of writing had to be graded. Journals and drafts weren't graded, but final pieces were. Faced with the dilemma of evaluating student writings which were good in content but poor in mechanics, the teachers tried various techniques such as point value grading scales, and double grading. Lucille tried peer editing. She reminded her students: "Last time, I underlined your errors, you corrected them, and everyone received an A or a B. This time, you are on your own. You will need to work with each other in finding your own errors." To her pleasant surprise, over half the students received high grades. During the fourth workshop Lois guided the teachers in developing their own grading scale based on criteria and

point values they established. (See Figure 3) Teachers were pleased with this device. It provided an objective evaluation for students, and correlated closely with what they considered a fair grade.

By the end of the second year most of the Project teachers were teaching writing as a process. Individual student writing folders were bursting with pieces of writing at all stages of development; students were working with each other in revising and editing their pieces; final products were published on bulletin boards in the classroom and hallways, in class books, and in newsletters to parents. Writing was creating a real excitement in the classroom!

Many of the Project teachers had also realized that having students complete textbook exercises and other isolated drills on mechanics had no significant effect or carry-over to the students' own writing. They found that working with students on mechanics through their own pieces of writing was much more effective. After spending several class periods on direct quotations, Jean asked her students to include direct quotations in their next writing. She was discouraged to find they couldn't apply what she thought they had learned. Only by working with them on their own pieces of writing did they really learn how to use and punctuate direct quotations.

Yes, writing does take time but, as the Project teachers discovered, it is time well spent. When they compared writings done by their students early in the year with those done toward the latter part of the year, they were pleased with the progress that had been made. They began to have more patience with themselves, not expecting perfection, and understanding that writing is a multifaceted skill developed with practice over a period of time. Also, they learned to expect mechanically imperfect papers when students were concentrating on just getting their stories down. After reading a student's two page paper that was completely devoid of punctuation and capitals Joe commented: "Before this year I would not have read more than two or three lines of this paper. Now I can ignore the mechanical mistakes and get to the content, knowing that we can fix it up later."

The Project teachers saw that writing skills involved more than the correctness of grammar, form, and mechanics. It was important for student writers to develop skills in brainstorming ideas, writing drafts, responding to what someone else has written in a helpful way, using feedback from others to revise their drafts, and finally editing and proofreading. The teachers also

saw how important it was for student writers to experience the joy and recognition of having their writing published.

Have the Project teachers really changed the way in which they teach writing? YES! As one building administrator commented to the group of Project teachers in his building at a roundtable discussion: "This is the most exciting thing I've seen in writing going on in this building in the twenty years I've been here!"

The Students:

Our first round of class visits showed us that students as well as teachers were in the process of transition. All the teachers in the Project had involved their students heavily in writing through journals, free writing, and the generating ideas presented at the first two workshops; most of the teachers had begun to provide opportunities for students to read their work aloud in class or share with peers in small groups. Student response was mixed, partly because the students were unfamiliar with these approaches to writing, partly because the teachers hadn't yet fully created the supportive environment that leads to a student's personal involvement in his or her own writing and respect for the work of others. Although most students were willing to write when asked to, a few just sat and stared at the paper, insisting that they had nothing to say or just outright refusing to participate; others barely produced a line or two before running out of ideas, or quickly scribbled down a few sentences and declared themselves "done."

Sharing of writing was also new to these students. Though they were eager to hear what others had written and surprisingly willing to volunteer to read their work aloud to the whole class or to friends in a small group, they didn't know how to respond to each other's work. With typical adolescent fervor, they giggled, cheered, and commented to each other all the way through a writer's reading or, in some classes, sat in stony-faced silence through intensely moving pieces. The writer, not the piece of writing, was often the focus of attention. Two teachers were quite concerned over the "panning" that had gone on when students were put into peer response groups for the first time, even though they had been given a definite task to accomplish and written guidelines specifying positive response plus questions and suggestions for the writer.

In one class, after what looked like a particularly successful writing workshop where students had written and then shared their pieces in small groups, one boy raised his hand in response to an offer to help and, egged on by his friends, asked, "What do you do if you hate to write?" Obviously, the negative attitudes toward writing and fear of failure that some students brought with them to middle school were not going to be eradicated easily.

Yet positive changes were beginning to occur. Even by December of the first year, students' journals and other papers were getting longer, indicating an increase in fluency, an ease with paper and pencil that hadn't existed before. Also, the majority of students were receptive to the constant flow of writing, were keeping journals, were willing to share their writing with peers. But most important, we already saw indications that when students were given the opportunity to write and offered a supportive environment, they were capable of producing powerful, highly readable prose and poetry. The simplest assignments often yielded astonishing results, as if students had kept ideas, feelings, experiences bottled up, waiting for this moment to let it all spill out on paper. A 7th grade girl's paper is an example of this phenomenon:

My Grandpa*

My Grandpa F ____ was my best friend. We used to do everything together. We'd go up to his bar and cook together in the kitchen. Then he would give me a dollar for the jukebox. He called me his little sigine. It was Hungarian. I can't remember what it meant. We used to go out in the woods, and once we found a baby rabbit with a broken leg. We took it home and tried to fix it but it died. I cried so hard in his lap. He said all things must die. I thought about it.

About a year later, my aunt called and wanted my mom. She sounded like she was crying. My grandpa had a tumor and

*All examples of student writing in this article have been typed exactly as written by the students.

was bleeding. A couple years before he had his voice box taken out. He could talk good now. They tried to fix him, but the next day he died. I didn't even find out until I eavesdropped on a telephone conversation.

I was so mad at the funeral home all I could do was cry. A couple days later my uncle took me down to the coffee and tea room, and told me to think about what my Grandpa said. I had just realized that I hadn't even consoled my Grandma. I thought that may make me feel better. It didn't. Then I remembered the rabbit. All things must die.

At the funeral I couldn't bear to see his face. That's when my uncle's girlfriend, now Aunt ___ helped me get through it. She said he died for his own good.

When he first started bleeding he was playing poker. He just won a bunch of money. A week later we found out that he was in the Flint bowling hall of fame. I forgot to tell you he's an excellent bowler.

This is a remarkable accomplishment for twenty minutes of in-class writing!

On our second round of visits, the change in students' attitudes toward writing and their behavior when working on their writing was strikingly different. They were all more willing, even eager to write, and were noticeably more involved in their writing. Helen described this new feeling in her classroom as "Freedom, even joy. They like it so much it's almost as if it were an elective class like gym or art." Orris reported that on the days she promised writing time students remind her as they enter class: "Now remember, you said we could write today." In classroom after classroom we saw 100% involvement in whatever writing activity was going on and students often called us over to their desks to read what they'd written or to ask us a question. They approached writing with a seriousness and sense of purpose that hadn't existed earlier in the year.

Critique groups were also working well. In several classes we saw students move quickly and easily into small clusters to work intently with each other's drafts. "Panning" was no longer a problem. Students read each other's pieces

enthusiastically and often offered good advice about revision. During whole class sharing, more students volunteered to read their work aloud than time permitted, and in several classes the students spontaneously broke into applause after hearing a particularly good piece.

There were positive changes in students' writing abilities, too. Increased fluency was obvious; when given an opportunity to write, everyone could, and the writings were definitely longer, richer, and more interesting than ever before. Many students had also learned how to revise their work for content, not just correct errors. For example, this 7th grader's first draft of a paper about an experience she had with her mother was vague and hard to follow:

> We thought it was funny when mom was sitting down in the movie scared to death and all a sudden a man up out a brush and my mother jump and when she jump her popcorn went up all over the people a I was embassa.

After a brief conference with her teacher, she completely re-did her paper, adding details that made the story clearer:

> We thought it was funny when mom was sitting in the movie theater watching friday the 13th as if it was real. When a man jump out of a brush mom jump up and all the popcorn went up. one lady jump up scared at her and took her popcorn and left. mom was very embassem cause she got up and wipe the popcorn off the lady and kept saying sorry. anut j ___ laughed so hard that every one was looking at her. soon it quieted down and thing was the same again.

The students seemed to be aware of their changed attitudes and abilities. When a Project teacher asked her classes to tell her how they felt about the writing process, they wrote:

"The best part of the process of writing I enjoyed was revising. It really helped me use my spelling abilities."

"I really like the process of brainstorming. It helps to get me ready for my first draft."

"It has given me a chance to help others in their writing, and that is what I enjoyed most...."

Students also expressed their general pleasure:

> "When I first started school this year I didn't like to write much. Mrs. ___ was always giving us something to do in our journals. It took me days to write something, but now I can write a whole composition in a hour. I like the brainstorming the best because I get to get all my thoughts on paper. I think writing is fun now."

During the second year of the Project, we saw new classes of students go through the same changes, only this time the experienced Project teachers knew what to expect and could handle discouraging responses with more confidence, aware that they would disappear as students became involved in the ongoing writing of the classroom. We could also offer support and encouragement to the new Project teachers when their initial writing activities met with less than one hundred percent cooperation from the students.

By the end of the second year, with over 2000 students in the Project teachers' classes, we could see the full impact of the Project on students. Whereas before there had been very little writing, now there was a prolific outpouring, ranging from personal experiences and poetry to reflections on Martin Luther King Day and the death of the astronauts. Teachers greeted us at the classroom door with piles of papers they wanted us to look at; students slipped poetry into our hands "for you to publish" or asked us to read parts of their journals or a chapter in "a novel I'm writing at home on the computer." Instead of working mainly on isolated drills in grammar/usage texts, students were working together to revise and edit their work, often for some form of in-class publication.

Most important of all, we were struck by the significance writing came to have in the lives of these students. Troubled by normal adolescent tensions

exacerbated by the difficult social environment that often existed outside of school, many found that writing offered them a safe place to deal with their emotions and the sometimes violent events of their lives. Orris described it this way: "When I let them write about anything, they all have something to say--drugs or problems or things they'd like to change. There's no place else to say it, so they write it." At one of our workshops, Mildred told us of a student who came to her in tears about a problem. When she suggested the student write about it, the student returned the next day with several pages saying , "Look how much I wrote. You were right!" And one student concluded a detailed and troubled piece of writing about her parents' separation with "Boy now I'm glad I got that out of my system."

Sometimes students would take a relatively innocuous writing assignment and use it to express painful experiences in their lives. A suggestion to write about "a frightening experience" produced stories about parents' divorce, a robbery at gunpoint in a local store, a court appearance for truancy. A dittoed story starter consisting of a few curved lines with instructions to complete the picture and then write about it, was used by one girl to show herself sitting on a deserted beach, watching the sun set over the water as she remembered the death of her brother in an auto accident years earlier.

For some, writing became a means to achieve recognition from peers and a feeling of personal success. In Jan's class a confirmed trouble-maker wrote a long, rhythmic anti-drug poem, then turned it into a "rap" which he and two friends performed, complete with sound effects and body movements, before an admiring and responsive school audience. In a journal-write following this performance, he expressed pleasure at feeling successful in school "for the first time" and thanked his teacher for having faith in his ability. The Project publication became an additional source of pride and pleasure for all the Project students, not just those who were published. Teachers reported they "couldn't get the booklets out of the kids' hands" and that the students preferred to read the publication rather than read anything else.

These changes in the Project's students confirm our belief that the process approach to writing instruction is highly effective. When developing writers are encouraged to view writing as a way to communicate meaningful ideas and experiences to a reader or to shape ideas for themselves, writing can take on a whole new purpose and intensity both in the classroom and in students' lives.

Conclusions

Although we are pleased by the progress both teachers and students have made, we must also accept the fact that not all our original goals and expectations have been met. At the start of the Project, we believed that the teachers would spend the first year learning about the process approach and developing skills in using it; the second year would be for increasing confidence and gaining mastery of the approach. What we found was that at any given point in the two years, the range of understanding and skill in applying the new concepts was considerable. As Loucks and Pratt suggest, each teacher's progress was unique. Some were able to deal almost immediately with all aspects of the process approach while others, even after two years in the Project, are still unsure of their role in helping students revise and edit their work. Though all the teachers are more confident in teaching writing as a result of the Project, most are still eager to learn more, still experimenting and discovering, still consider themselves novices as writing teachers. During the third year of the Project, the teachers will work on curriculum design for writing and continue to meet regularly for sharing, creating new materials, and continuing to learn about teaching writing. They have also requested that the same schedule of class visits and the quarterly publication be continued.

Perhaps our biggest frustration is that we could not involve more of the middle school language arts teachers. Approximately fifty percent of them have been in the Project for at least some portion of it, enough to ensure that many Flint middle schoolers will go through at least one year of this approach to writing instruction. However, many more middle school teachers must be reached before the sweeping changes we had envisioned in the middle school writing curriculum become a reality.

Our experience has shown us that staff development is much more complex than scheduling an inservice day or even a series of inservices. Any school or district embarking on a program that requires teachers to master a new set of understandings and skills must acknowledge the length of time it takes before the new learnings are consolidated and become a natural part of each teacher's instructional approach. Also, teachers' needs and concerns must be supported as they undertake the changes that lead to true professional progress. We believe the success of the Flint Writing Project stems from the following factors:

1. University/School District Collaboration: the combination of knowledge in the latest research theory, and methods that a unversity faculty member can bring to teacher training and re-training, coupled with the understanding of the district's schools, teachers, students, and administrators that only a member of the school district's curriculum staff can have. In our case, it was Lois' experience as as composition teacher and Writing Project director combined with Marian's commitment to change, her co-ordination of the Project, and her continual presence in the schools for encouragement and support that led to the Project's success.

2. Workshop/Classroom Visit Structure: the mixture of inservice workshops to introduce new concepts and materials plus classroom visits to support, praise, demonstrate new techniques, and give specific advice. In Flint, we carried the inservice model right through the classroom doors in non-threatening ways that encouraged the teachers to experiment and supported them through the process.

FLINT MIDDLE SCHOOLS WRITING PROJECT
1984 - 1985

October	What's Basic to Teaching Writing?
November	Generating Writing
December	Classroom Visits
January	Responding to Writing
February	Grading/Evaluating and Publishing Writing
April	Classroom Visits
May	Implementing the Curriculum

Figure 1

FLINT MIDDLE SCHOOLS WRITING PROJECT
1985 - 1986

October	The Writing Process Revisited
	Individual Conferences with returning Project teachers
December	Read to Write, Write to Read: Ways of Responding to Literature
January	Classroom Visits
February	Writing in Process: The Teacher's Role
March	Approaches to Assessment: Grading Writing and Judging Growth
April	Publication of Students' Writings
May	Presentations, Publications, Future Plans
	Classroom Visits
	Publication of Students' Writings

Figure 2

FLINT WRITING PROJECT
GRADING GUIDE

The Writing Process

15
- Pre-Writing
- Rough Draft
- Second Draft

Mechanics

15
- Paragraphing
- Complete Sentences
- Punctuation
- Grammar
- Spelling
- Capitalization

Structure/Organization

25
- Introduction
- Body: Development
  - Examples
  - Use of Details
- Conclusion

Content/Meaning

30
- Main Point
- Ideas
- Creativity
- Effective Use of Language
- Interesting to Readers

Form

15
- Cursive
- One Side
- Margins
- Ink
- Neatness

Total Points _____

Comments:

Figure 3